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SITE OF CHINESE TEST: Nuclear missile was believed to have been launched from some point on the circle 400 miles from the Lop Nor test area (cross).

Range of Chinese Missile Put at 400 Miles by U.S.

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 27—The United States has preliminary indications that the Chinese Communists fired a missile about 400 miles and that it carried an atomic warhead of the size dropped on the basis of seismic signals at the Hiroshima during World War II.

The global instrument network that monitored the Chinese explosion gave no immediate confirmation of the Chinese statement that the warhead had been carried by a missile before detonation on target. However, there was indirect evidence supporting the Chinese claim, which American officials were inclined to accept as accurate.

The explosion, the Atomic Energy Commission announced, took place in the vicinity of Lob Nor, the Chinese test site in Sinkiang Province, and apparently had an explosive yield of slightly more than 20 kilotons, equivalent to the explosive force of 20,000 tons of TNT.

The A.E.C. said that "preliminary estimates indicate the yield was in the low to low-intermediate range, similar to the first Chinese test."

Soviet Test Reported

The commission also announced that the Soviet Union conducted what was probably its largest underground test since the treaty on a limited test ban entered into force in 1963.

Novaya Zemlya had a yield of around one megaton. This would be larger than any underground test conducted by the United States.

It appeared that the missile had been fired from a launching site some 400 miles from Lob Nor. There conflicting theories as to the nature of the missile and thus of the military threat it poses. One theory was that Communist China had used a medium-range ballistic missile, which is designed to deliver an atomic warhead on targets about 500 to 700 miles away. Potential targets in that range include Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines in the Pacific; Southeast Asia, India and Pakistan.

Another theory, advanced by Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington, was that an air-breathing missile designed to be fired from a submarine had been tested.

If the Senator's theory is correct — he is chairman of the Military Applications subcommittee of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy — it would mean that Communist China would have limited capability of launching an atomic attack on the United States. Administration officials had estimated they would.

With the capability of launching a missile attack on neighbors in two or three years, Administration officials had estimated that it would be the mid-nineteen-seventies before it could develop intercontinental missiles.

According to Senator Jackson's theory, the Chinese Communists are attempting to compress this schedule by developing missiles that can be fired from submarines off the American coasts. Communist China has about 30 operational submarines, and a few of these are known to be equipped with tubes for surface launchings of air-breathing missiles.

Mr. Jackson said in a telephone interview from Wenatchee, Wash., that he believed the Chinese explosion was designed to "proof-test" the missile and warhead planned for use aboard submarines.

He analyzed the test as a preliminary to development of a warhead for a medium-range ballistic missile, which, he notes, would be capable of hitting all

of the times fighting in Vietnam except Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Communist China has once again surprised and disturbed American officials by its unexpectedly rapid progress in nuclear technology.

There were indications that the test had been timed for its impact on President Johnson's Asian tour. Mr. Jackson, who attended at the test in a Senate speech last week, said he was convinced, on the basis of information made available to him, that the Chinese had stepped up their schedule.

Developing an atomic warhead that is small enough to ride on a missile and still produce a large explosive yield represents one of the most difficult challenges of atomic technology.

It was nearly 10 years after its first atomic test in 1945, for example, before the United States made the breakthrough in hydrogen weapons design that permitted it to start developing warheads for missiles.

Pentagon and State Department officials emphasized, as they have after each Chinese test, that neither in number of warheads or delivery systems could Communist China hope to rival the atomic power of the United States or the Soviet Union, and thus the Chinese tests in no way alter the military balance of power.

But it was privately acknowledged that in psychological terms the tests could have an unsettling effect on the military balance if it should develop that China was acquiring capability to launch atomic missile attacks on its neighbors or to "blackmail" the United States with a submarine missile attack.

The Chinese test is expected to have domestic repercussions in intensifying the debate over whether the United States system.

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